



Sermon Growth Guide

October 3, 2021

Belong – Belong to God

Romans 12:1-2

Key Verse: Romans 12:2a Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Big Idea: The world says you are alone, but God says you belong.

Foundations

Throughout this series we are striving to break the stronghold of loneliness that is thick not only in our cultural waters, but also in many of our own hearts. We break free of loneliness by coming to a working knowledge that we belong to God and His people in vibrant relationship.

We are spending the majority of our remaining weeks of the *Belong* series in Romans chapter twelve. One key treasure this week is that Romans 12 is not individualistic, but rather communal.

We, together, are called away from the pattern of the world and into the vibrant Kingdom life where true belonging thrives forevermore. The key piece of “the pattern of the world” we examine this week is the lie of loneliness.

We lie to ourselves. The world lies to us. And Satan lies to us. Lies upon lies that we are alone. Alone leads to despair. But thanks be to God who gives us the opposite of alone—in Christ you and I have eternal belonging to the greatest degree.

Lift up this time in prayer. Thank God for each person around you. Thank God for the immeasurable comfort you have in your belonging to God and God’s family.

Understanding God’s Word

What all is meant by “God’s mercy” in verse 1?

According to this passage, what is true worship?

What does Paul mean by the phrase “pattern of this world” in verse 2?

Applying God’s Word

The world says you are alone, but God says you belong. What cycles of loneliness do you need God’s strength to break in your own life? With your circle, develop a plan to break free of all cycles of loneliness in your life.

Witnessing God’s Word

Where is there loneliness in your day-to-day context? Is there any loneliness on your street? Is there any loneliness in your work environment? Is there any loneliness in your family or extended family or those closest to you?

With the help of your circle, identify some strategies to join God in bringing forth His belonging into the communities in which you live.

ALONE IS NO GOOD. JESUS INVITES YOU TO BELONG.

Pastor Linda Boyles is reading a book called *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*. She told me this week that one of the cures to loneliness mentioned in the book is serving others: “helping others effectively erased the loneliness caused by loss.” I asked her to look again. I’m pretty sure that’s backwards. To cure my loneliness, get everybody else to serve me! I mean, that’s how I look at it. But she looked again and said, no, it is definitely serve others. Go figure! We just had another monumental day yesterday. The annual CityServe day. There were 3,000 volunteers out there from dozens of churches delivering thousands of hours of service at 175 sites! I love celebrating the love we share, church. Cure loneliness. Find someone to serve.

Where have we been? Since August we have been talking about **Belong**. Alone is no

good. Jesus invites you to belong. We want to rupture the loneliness patterns and create genuine, true community and belonging—life together. Jesus pulled the Samaritan Woman at the Well out of loneliness. He did the same thing with Peter. It was a pattern, moving from **Alone to Risk Being Known**, then be **Open to God** and finally **Open to Others**. For the rest of the series, we are in Romans 12 asking, how does this play out for the church? How does this change who we are as a Gospel community? How does the church, as a body, move from alone to belonging in Jesus?

Romans is a letter to the believers in Rome, “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people.” (Romans 1:7) That’s to a group, not a person, not an individual. I feel like I’m always reminding us when we read these letters in the Bible, this is a group exercise. Romans 12 is a passage that we often work out

as individuals, and that’s good. But I want you to understand as we read, never does this language pivot to individual, personal, singular. Do you want to walk in the ways of Jesus? Do you want to be like Christ? Do you want to grow in the kindness and grace and mercy of the Lord? You are not going to do it alone! “I am a rock; I am an island.” No, you’re not! You are a twig in a river. Stand together or fall alone. This is not a solo exercise. This is a together thing, church.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1) I remember as a new Christian thinking about this verse in purely individual terms. How do I do that? How can I lay down my life, my body, as a living sacrifice for Jesus? Jesus died for me, I want to lay my life down for him. That is good



Christian thinking, but it's also lonely Christian thinking. This is not a singular tense verse. What if you can't do it alone? What if it takes all of us together intent, as a collective body, to be a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God? It might not be, "I hope the church helps me accomplish my goal of laying my life down." It might be, "I hope I can help the church, I hope I can be part of a community as we, all together, learn to lay ourselves down, a living sacrifice." See how that changes things?

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:2) All together. Not a rock. Not an island. A community of true belonging. A body united. The church offers an alternative way of life. It is an alternative city within the city. Don't conform, don't set your pattern according

to the patterns of the world and its way of life. Instead, be transformed. Be shaped according to the patterns of Jesus and his way of life. These are plural. Together now. Be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Interestingly, "mind" is singular. We become a body and we share one "mind"—the mind of Christ. Philippians 2 says, "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." (Philippians 2:1-2 ESV) Have the mind of Christ together. I worry that the church is perpetuating rugged, isolated individualism. You were not made to be alone. Together is better.

Do not conform to this world. In the context of this series, I want to name one big lie. The big lie. The big lie is this: You are alone. Or if I can put it this way, the

big lie says: You belong only to yourself. This is the big lie that I want you to not conform to, but instead be transformed by the renewing of your one mind, I want us to be transformed together in one mind, the mind of Christ, as we resist the big lie—you are alone. The lie wants to convince you you are alone.

You are alone in your achievements. I remember as a kid piling up my report cards. We used to get actual cards, not just a login code. I carried them home, showed them to my parents, then laid them carefully in my desk drawer. I was proud because they were always straight-A's. But then the bitter twist. I was alone in my achievement. Why? Because it never seemed like the congratulations was enough. It never seemed like the light shined bright enough on my little achiever heart. Why doesn't this feeling satisfy? Then came high school when my Spanish teacher had the gall to give me



a B-minus! B-minus?! Didn't she know who I was? The big lie says you are alone in your achievements, alone in your trophy room. No one really sees; no one really knows. What if instead of piling up trophies in private places where the applause is never loud enough, what if instead I was grateful? Grateful to God who gave me a measure of intelligence. Grateful for my teachers, my schools, my fellow students. Thank you, Lord, for these brains. How can I use them for you? How can I use them to serve and bless others? "If I were a wise man, I would do my part." Remember that from the Christmas carol? What's my part? Serve God. Serve others. Not alone.

You are alone in your failures.

I just caught that scene in the Lion King when Simba found his father...(I won't ruin it). The evil uncle comes along and says, "Simba, what have you done? What will your mother think? What will the people say? Run

away, Simba. Run away." When you make a mistake, when you hit a failure, it is so easy to feel alone. Why can't I succeed? Why am I the only one who fails? I can't let anybody see. I have to run and hide. That is a big lie. Don't conform to the patterns of this world. You are not alone. Every life has failure. Every life!

You are alone in your joys. The big lie is that your joys, your pleasures, are only for you. Your pleasure is the highest priority. Nobody understands what you need but you, and you deserve to feel pleasure. You deserve this. So much damage is done when we believe the lie that we are alone in our joys. Listen, God did not create the people around you or this beautiful created world to be consumed by you like candy for your own pleasure. There are great joys and great pleasures in the Lord! But they are not alone pleasures, not selfish pleasures. That's a lie.

You are alone in your

sufferings. The woe-is-me syndrome. Nobody suffers like I do. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. But it's deeper than that, isn't it? Nobody understands how my body feels, this pain. You don't know what it's like to walk around with cancer. Nobody else is having a hard time raising their kids. Just me. Alone. It's a lie. It's the voice of the deceiver. Have you heard those whispers, trying to pull you out of community? Trying to get you to hide; to get you alone? Evil. Scripture compares these dark forces to a crouching lion waiting to pounce. The predator doesn't attack the herd. Every movement of the predator is calculated to separate the prey. Get you alone. It's the big lie—I am alone. I belong only to myself. Church, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy I urge you: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and



approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2) The big lie says: You belong to yourself. You are alone.

The Heidelberg Catechism is one of our confessions. Our church has confessions and creeds out of history we trust as faithful guides to what scripture teaches us to do and to believe. It's one way to guarantee we are never

alone—we are part of the body reaching back through time. We receive the voices of the past into the present. Heidelberg is a Reformation document from five hundred years ago, in a question and answer format. Here is “Question One: What is your only comfort, in life and in death? Answer: That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. At the cost of his own blood he has

fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil.” The big lie says we belong to ourselves. Jesus says, you belong to me. Church, do not conform to the patterns of this world, and do not swallow the big lie. You are not alone. You do not belong only to yourself. Your comfort, in life, in death, is that you—we—belong to Jesus.

